

Public Testimony for the proposed Seward Girdwood Iditarod National Trail Project.

I am a resident of Girdwood who uses the portions of the forest proposed for closure to motorized vehicles.

The Glacier Ranger district in general, and the Winner Creek valley in particular, are very important to me, and my family, for the nordic and telemark skiing opportunities that it provides. The values of this area as a place close to home where we can enjoy winter quiet, solitude, and back-country/quasi-wilderness experience have already been negatively impacted by the presence of commercial helicopter activity in the valley. Opening the area to snowmobile traffic would completely destroy the winter value of this area to me and my family and displace us from the area. I have used this area for over a decade; my partner has used it for over 20 years, my daughter has used it her entire life. Impacts on the Winner Creek valley would negatively impact the quality of our life in Girdwood, since opportunities for quiet, solitude, non-motorized winter recreation that existed when we moved here, 10 and 20 years ago, respectively, were major reasons my partner and I make Girdwood our home. Winner Creek valley, during the hours that it is not used by helicopters, is the ONLY remaining opportunity for quiet backcountry nordic skiing that remains in the vicinity of the Girdwood valley. Glacier creek valley is now used by snowmachines; Placer river valley, Twenty-mile valley, and the Johnson Pass area have become snowmachine highways, displacing me and my family for most of the ski season. Turnagain pass is LOUD, until you get far enough up or back to escape the roar of motors. The air quality in the non-motorized areas close to these motorized areas is frequently unpleasant, if not unhealthy. The same thing will happen to Winner Creek valley if snowmachine access is provided. There is no place on the forest that can substitute for this value of Winner Creek valley if it is opened to snowmachine use.

Putting a motorized trail through Winner Creek valley will effectively open the entire valley to snowmachine use-- trail access through the forest and flats is the only thing that has traditionally kept snowmachines from the high country. Allowing snowmachines onto a corridor will effectively open the entire area, high country and low to snowmachines. It will lead to conflicts with existing telemark and nordic ski use, much as at Turnagain Pass, but with no road access it is unrealistic that the Forest Service will be able to police the area and enforce off-trail closures.

The valley is narrow. It amplifies sound, as has been demonstrated when helicopters are present. It is too small to accommodate both nordic skiers, heli-skiers and snowmachines. On days when the air is still, snowmachines would have a detrimental effect on the air-quality, which is currently excellent.

Wolves, bear and moose use this valley. We have seen signs of brown bears early in the spring, signs of wolves and moose all winter long. Since the neighboring valleys (Twentymile and Glacier Creek) are used by snowmachines, Winner creek may provide a critical refuge for wildlife during the heavy snowmachine season. Wildlife is abundant and evident in Twentymile valley whenever it is impassable to snowmachines, but scant when the valley is used heavily by snowmachines; wildlife needs someplace quiet and not heavily used by people to retreat.

Regarding closures in Crow Creek and Portage valley, the Forest Service should consider how failing to close these sections of the Iditarod trail would cumulatively affect opportunities for non-motorized winter recreation on the Glacier Ranger district. It would leave inadequate opportunities to meet the growing demand for non-motorized winter backcountry recreation, by encroaching on somewhere between 50% and 60% of the district's closed areas. Unless substitute areas are created, it would clearly have a devastating effect on the non-motorized winter recreation values of the Glacier ranger district.

Finally, there are no homesites or villages that have been traditionally accessed by the proposed closed routes. All homesites and communities in the area are accessible via road, so the closures would only impact recreational activities.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment and for holding this public hearing.

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